Organic Vegetable Production

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Presentation Overview

- Trends in Organic Production
- Soil Health and Fertility
- Pest Management
- Marketing
- Pricing Organic Products
Introduction

- U.S. organic food sales have grown between 17 and 21 percent each year since 1997.
- Conventionally grown food sales that have grown only 2 to 4 percent a year for the same time period.
- Organic food sales now represent approximately 2 percent of U.S. food sales
- Organic production is a ‘system’ approach that improves the condition of the soil and reduces soil erosion.
Soil Health and Fertility

- The use of crop rotation is critical in organic production to break up the pest cycle between families of plants and other susceptible hosts.
- Organic producers can provide nutrients to their crops through the use of composted manures, cover crops and approved blended materials.
- Organic growers are required to improve the biological productivity of their soil:
  - cover crops, while providing organic matter and erosion control, can also provide nutrients (mostly Nitrogen).
Pest Management

• Insects are managed through
  – enhancement of biodiversity (increasing natural enemy populations
  – providing habitat
  – crop rotation
  – adjusting planting dates
  – use of approved chemical products.

• Weed management is obtained through
  – use of cover crops
  – mulches
  – tillage
  – flaming
  – manual removal
  – The manual control of weeds in an organic system is one of the factors that increase the cost of raising vegetables organically
Pest Management

• Diseases are managed through
  – Use of resistant varieties
  – Cultural controls (proper water usage, removal of diseased plant materials, adjusting planting dates)
  – Approved Products (www.omri.org)
Marketing Organic Products

• The majority of locally grown organic products are sold directly to the consumer through farmers markets, roadside stands and CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture)

• There is an increasing organic wholesale market to health stores and supermarkets due to consumer demand
  – Selling to these larger markets often takes higher quantity of production

• It is necessary for organic producers to educate the consumer on the principles of organic growing and why purchasing organic provides a benefit
Pricing Organic Products

• Organic offers a “premium” that consumers may be willing to pay for the organic label
  – Organic production is more labor intensive therefore prices should reflect that cost

• Determining the Price for your Product:
  – Determine the value of your inputs (physical and purchased)
  – Know what the market can bear (is there an over-production of organic zucchini?)
Additional Resources

- Organic Materials Review Institute  [www.omri.org](http://www.omri.org)
- Organic Trade Association  [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)
- New Farm magazine  [www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)